

HUMANIZING BRANDED GENERICS: TRANSFORMING COMMODITY PERCEPTION THROUGH PATIENT-CENTERED MARKETING ECOSYSTEMS

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by

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Under the Supervision and Guidance of

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CERTIFICATE

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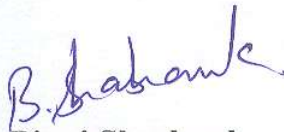
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DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I hereby declare that this dissertation titled **Humanizing Branded Generics: Transforming Commodity Perception Through Patient-Centered Marketing Ecosystems** is the bonafide record of my original research work. I declare that it has not been submitted to any other university or institution for the award of any degree or diploma. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been duly acknowledged in the text.



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Date: 31/05/2025

Abstract

Title: Humanizing Branded Generics: Transforming Commodity Perception Through Patient-Centered Marketing Ecosystems

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Keywords: Branded Generics, Patient-Centered Marketing, Trust, Digital Engagement, Pharmaceutical Branding, Consumer Perception, Physician Endorsement, Healthcare Communication

Background:

Branded generics, which are off-patent drugs marketed under brand names, represent the majority share of India's pharmaceutical market, offering cost-effective alternatives to patented medicines. Despite their clinical equivalence, these drugs are often viewed as commoditized and lacking credibility. This is primarily due to limited patient engagement, inadequate communication, and a physician-centric marketing approach that excludes the end-user's perspective. In the context of growing health literacy and digital engagement, there is an urgent need to shift to patient-centred marketing strategies that build trust, improve awareness, and encourage adoption of branded generics.

Objective:

The study aims to evaluate the influence of patient-centred marketing ecosystems on the perception, trust, and adoption of branded generics.

Key objectives include:

- (1) assessing stakeholder perceptions
- (2) evaluating the effectiveness of HCP endorsements and digital marketing
- (3) identifying differentiators between branded and unbranded generics
- (4) developing a patient-focused marketing framework.

Methodology:

A cross-sectional mixed-methods study was conducted from March 10 to May 31, 2025. The study involved 370 participants: 250 patients, 100 healthcare professionals (HCPs), and 20 pharmaceutical marketers. Data collection involved structured surveys, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions, distributed across urban and rural India. Sampling techniques included convenience sampling for patients, purposive sampling for

HCPs, and snowball sampling for marketers. Quantitative data was analysed using SAS for statistical procedures (descriptive statistics, chi-square, logistic regression).

Results/Findings:

The study revealed moderate familiarity with branded generics: 30% of participants were very familiar, while 18% lacked familiarity. Perceptions of quality varied—31% rated branded generics similar to patented drugs, 27% inferior, and 22% superior. Trust levels were nearly evenly split: 35% trusted them, 34% did not, and 31% were unsure. Key influencing factors were price and affordability (55%), physician recommendations (50%), and personal experience (40%). Digital marketing reached 60% of respondents but was rated highly effective by only 10%. Logistic regression indicated digital campaigns (OR=1.8) and discounts (OR=1.5) significantly boosted purchase intent. HCP endorsements influenced trust in 45% of respondents. Prior users were 42% more likely to recommend branded generics. Based on these insights, a strategic framework was developed encompassing multilingual education, omnichannel engagement, physician advocacy, and patient reassurance initiatives.

Conclusions:

Patient-centred marketing strategies significantly enhance trust and adoption of branded generics. The results underscore the importance of shifting from a prescriber-driven to a patient-inclusive marketing model. Transparent quality communication, strategic HCP partnerships, and targeted digital outreach are vital in reshaping perceptions. The study proposes a scalable marketing framework applicable across India and other emerging markets. Recommendations include implementing multilingual education campaigns, developing HCP-led patient assurance programs, and integrating digital and offline marketing channels using technologies like QR codes and WhatsApp chatbots. Future research could explore rural-specific interventions to overcome geographic biases identified in this study.

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1. Introduction

Branded generics make up more than 80% of all drug sales in India, branded generics are vital to the country's pharmaceutical industry (1). They preserve therapeutic efficacy while providing patients with access to reasonably priced alternatives (2). In spite of this, many people still view them as less effective or commodified alternatives to patented medications (3). For pharmaceutical marketers looking to set their brands apart and cultivate enduring customer trust, this perception gap poses a significant obstacle (4).

With minimal focus on the patient's involvement in the decision-making process, the conventional pharmaceutical marketing model has mainly depended on physician endorsements and medical representatives (5). But now more than ever, patient-centered marketing is required due to the emergence of digital platforms, increased health literacy, and a growing focus on value-based care.

This chapter defines the research questions and objectives, gives definitions for important terms like patient-centered marketing and branded generics, and explains the reasoning behind the study. The chapter additionally puts attention to the current gap in practice and literature regarding the integration of patient education, HCP advocacy, and digital engagement into a cohesive marketing ecosystem.

Research Questions:

- What is the impact of patient-centered marketing tactics on the uptake of branded generic medications?
- What elements influence consumers' perceptions of brand value as opposed to commodity value?
- How can healthcare providers and digital platforms contribute to the growth of consumer confidence in branded generics?

Objectives:

- To assess current perceptions of branded generics among patients, HCPs, and marketers.
- To evaluate the impact of patient-centered marketing on brand trust and adoption.
- To identify differentiators between branded generics and commodity generics.

- To develop a scalable marketing framework that integrates digital engagement, HCP advocacy, and patient education.

Hypotheses:

- H1: Patient-centered marketing significantly improves consumer trust in branded generics.
- H2: Digital platforms and physician endorsements positively influence brand perception and adoption.

2. Review of Literature

This study's literature review is based on a wide range of scholarly works, official government publications, market research studies, and regulatory body publications. It offers a thorough analysis of branded generics, the obstacles to their uptake, and the function of patient-centered marketing ecosystems (6).

2.1 Understanding Branded Generics

Off-patent medications sold under a brand name are known as "branded generics," and they are frequently made by reputable pharmaceutical companies (2). Through branding and marketing, they are positioned as superior to unbranded generics, despite having the same active ingredients and clinical benefits as patented medications (3). Due to strong physician-driven prescribing practices and lax substitution laws, branded generics dominate the pharmaceutical market in India (1). But they frequently find it difficult to stand out in the eyes of customers (4).

2.2 Significance in the Indian Pharmaceutical Market

The branded generics market in India is unique. Indian consumers and, more importantly, Indian physicians express a preference for branded generics, in contrast to Western nations where cost pressures result in a greater reliance on unbranded generics. This is because of the influence of pharmaceutical representatives and the perceived assurance of quality (3,5). Nevertheless, price sensitivity, a lack of consumer education, and uneven branding strategies impede market penetration (6).

2.3 Challenges Faced by Branded Generics

Key challenges include:

- **Perception of Inferiority:** Many patients believe that lower quality equals lower cost (2).
- **Price Control Policies:** The profitability of branded generics is restricted by regulatory price caps (7).
- **Limited Brand Differentiation:** Generics are viewed as interchangeable goods in the absence of distinct branding and messaging (4).

- Low Awareness: A lot of patients don't know what branded generics are (7).

2.4 Emergence of Patient-Centered Marketing

In India, prescriber-centric models have become the main focus of traditional pharmaceutical marketing (5). However, there is a pattern toward patient involvement in the decision-making process due to increased digital engagement and health awareness (7). Patient-centered marketing places a strong emphasis on patient education, trust-building via open communication, and delivering tailored health messages via digital platforms (8).

2.5 Role of Digital Platforms and HCP Endorsements

Current study emphasizes how digital channels, such as social media, email marketing, and health applications, are increasingly influencing consumer health decisions (8). Healthcare workers, however, still have a significant impact on how people perceive a brand. Their recommendations act as a trust-building link between the customer and the pharmaceutical company (5).

2.6 Literature Gap

Few studies have focused on bringing together these tactics into a cohesive patient-centered marketing ecosystem, despite the fact that numerous studies have examined the branding of generics and the efficacy of digital marketing (7,8). By assessing an all-encompassing model that incorporates digital tools, HCP advocacy, and educational outreach, this dissertation aims to close that gap.

2.7 Summary of Literature

Table 2-1 Summary of Key Literature on Branded Generics

Author(s) & Year	Methodology	Key Findings	Relevance to Study
Frank & Salkever (1997) (1)	Purposive sample, USA	Branded generics enhance perceived quality via branding.	Validates brand perception as a marketing tool.
Reddy & Chaturvedi (2021) (2)	Survey (India, n=300)	Trust tied to HCP endorsement and transparency.	Highlights influence of HCP in brand trust.

Hollis & Grootendorst (2019) (3)	Global review	Branded generics dominate in emerging markets.	Supports market relevance in India.
Kumar et al. (2022) (5)	Snowball sample (India)	Physician endorsements improve consumer confidence.	Aligns with marketing strategies used in this study.
Rao & Singh (2020) (7)	Random sample (India)	Digital platforms effective for educating patients.	Reinforces role of digital in patient engagement.
WHO (2021) (6)	Policy overview	Branding improves consumer trust in generics.	Validates branding as a key factor in adoption.

The literature reviewed provides a strong foundation for this study and underscores the necessity for a cohesive, patient-centred marketing approach in the branded generics segment.

3. Methodology

The systematic approach used to examine how patient-centered marketing affects Indian consumers' trust and uptake of branded generics is presented in this chapter. A mixed-methods approach was selected due to the multifaceted nature of the research questions, which encompass perceptions, behaviour, and strategic influences. This made it possible to analyse both quantifiable trends and subjective perceptions from a variety of stakeholders.

3.1 Research Approach

A cross-sectional, mixed-methods research design was used for the study. While qualitative methods helped reveal the deeper motivations, hesitations, and preferences of patients and healthcare professionals, quantitative methods were used to find quantifiable trends in awareness, trust, and purchase behaviour. The complexity of pharmaceutical brand perception trust, which is not only measurable but also ingrained in complex personal and professional experiences, is the justification for employing this design

3.2 Study Context and Setting

With an emphasis on branded generics, a leading category in the Indian pharmaceutical market, the study was situated within the larger Indian healthcare ecosystem. Data was gathered from hospitals, pharmacies, and online communities like health forums and WhatsApp groups in both urban and rural areas. This varied environment made sure that viewpoints from different demographic groups were captured in a balanced manner.

3.3 Target Population

Three key respondent groups were targeted:

- **Patients (n=250):** Individuals within the age of 25 to 40 who had taken branded generic medications in the year before. They stand in for the main customers whose behaviour and trust the study aims to comprehend.
- **Healthcare Professionals (n=100):** This group includes physicians and pharmacists, who play a key role in influencing patient decisions. Patient behaviour is greatly influenced by their recommendations, counselling approach, and familiarity with branded generics.

- Pharmaceutical Marketers (n=20): Product and brand managers who create and implement marketing plans for branded generics. Their observations offered a strategic point of view on positioning in the market.

3.4 Sampling Strategy

To ensure representation:

- Convenience sampling was used to choose patients during community health camps and hospital visits.
- Purposive sampling was used to identify HCPs, specifically those who were known to prescribe or recommend branded generics.
- Snowball sampling was used to reach pharmaceutical marketers, beginning with industry networks and working their way up from professional recommendations.

3.5 Data Collection Techniques

A triangulated method was adopted:

- Surveys: Data on patient perceptions, brand preferences, familiarity, and influencing factors (such as price, endorsements, and digital visibility) were collected using standardized questionnaires..
- In-depth Interviews: HCPs and marketers participated in semi-structured interviews that explored their reasons, concerns, and strategic choices regarding branding and patient involvement.
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Held with patients to promote interactive communication and ascertain general opinions about branded generics.

3.6 Secondary Data Integration

Secondary data was essential for validation and market context.

Sources included:

- IQVIA, McKinsey reports on Indian pharmaceutical trends (9).
- WHO and DCGI guidelines on generic branding and pharmacovigilance (6) (10).
- Academic journals addressing consumer behaviour and digital health adoption.

3.7 Analytical Framework

- Quantitative Analysis: Performed using SAS software. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency distribution) established general trends, while inferential tools like Chi-square tests and logistic regression evaluated associations between marketing strategies and trust/adoption metrics.
- Qualitative Analysis: Transcripts of interviews and focus group discussions were subjected to basic SAS text analysis techniques in order to find recurring terms and patterns. These were then grouped into themes like physician influence, digital fatigue, trust, and educational gaps.

3.8 Ethical and Quality Considerations

Integrity of ethics was maintained by:

- Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC) approval
- Informed consent forms signed by all participants
- Anonymization of data during analysis and reporting
- Regular quality checks to validate survey completeness and consistency

3.9 Methodological Strengths and Limitations

The strength of this study is how well it balances narrative depth with statistical rigor. The study offers a comprehensive perspective by integrating patient opinions, expert recommendations, and marketing objectives. However, limitations include reliance on convenience sampling and the potential underrepresentation of rural or elderly patient populations.

This robust methodology supports the research objectives by offering both evidence-based patterns and actionable insights into how branded generics can be repositioned through patient-centered marketing.

4. Results

This chapter presents the empirical findings derived from both the quantitative surveys and the qualitative interviews and focus group discussions conducted during the study. The analysis reveals trends, patterns, and critical insights into how patients, healthcare professionals (HCPs), and pharmaceutical marketers perceive branded generics and how various marketing interventions influence their behaviour and attitudes.

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of 370 participants formed the study sample, comprising 250 patients (67.6%), 100 HCPs (27%), and 20 pharmaceutical marketing professionals (5.4%). The mean age of respondents was 32.7 years, with a targeted focus on the 25–40 age group to reflect the digitally active and health-conscious demographic. Gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 204 female (55%) and 166 male (45%) participants, contributing to a comprehensive gender perspective. The inclusion of urban and semi-urban respondents ensured diversity in socioeconomic and regional representation.

Table 4-1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Characteristic	Value
Mean Age	32.7 Years
Gender (Female/Male)	204/166

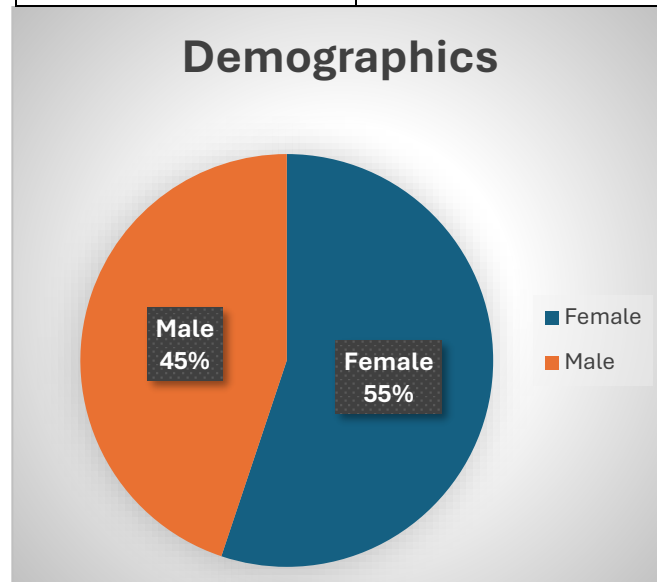


Figure 4-1 Demographics

4.2 Familiarity and Perceptions of Branded Generics

A mixed level of awareness about branded generics was observed:

- 30% reported being “very familiar”
- 32% were “somewhat familiar”
- 20% were “moderately familiar”
- 18% reported being “not familiar”

Table 4-2 Familiarity with Branded Generics

Familiarity Level	Percentage %
Very familiar	30
Somewhat familiar	32
Moderately familiar	20
Not familiar	18

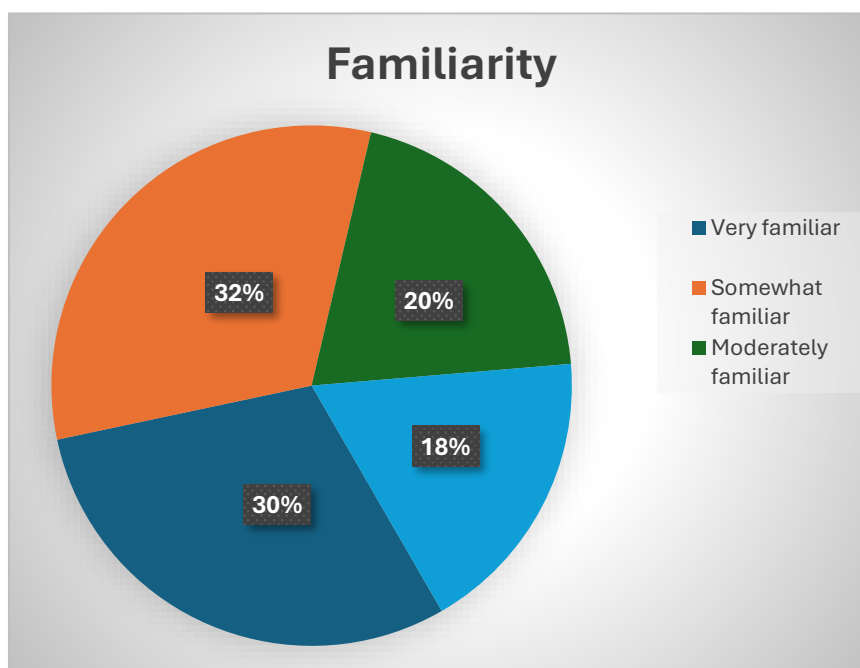


Figure 4-2 Familiarity Level

This suggests that despite the dominance of branded generics in the Indian pharmaceutical market, a significant section of the population still lacks full awareness. This gap in awareness hinders the potential trust-building necessary for brand loyalty.

When comparing branded generics with patented drugs:

- 31% viewed them as equally effective
- 27% believed they were of inferior quality
- 22% rated them as superior

- 20% were unsure

Table 4-3 Perceptions Compared to Patented Drugs

Perception	Percentage %
Equally effective	31
Inferior quality	27
Superior	22
Unsure	20

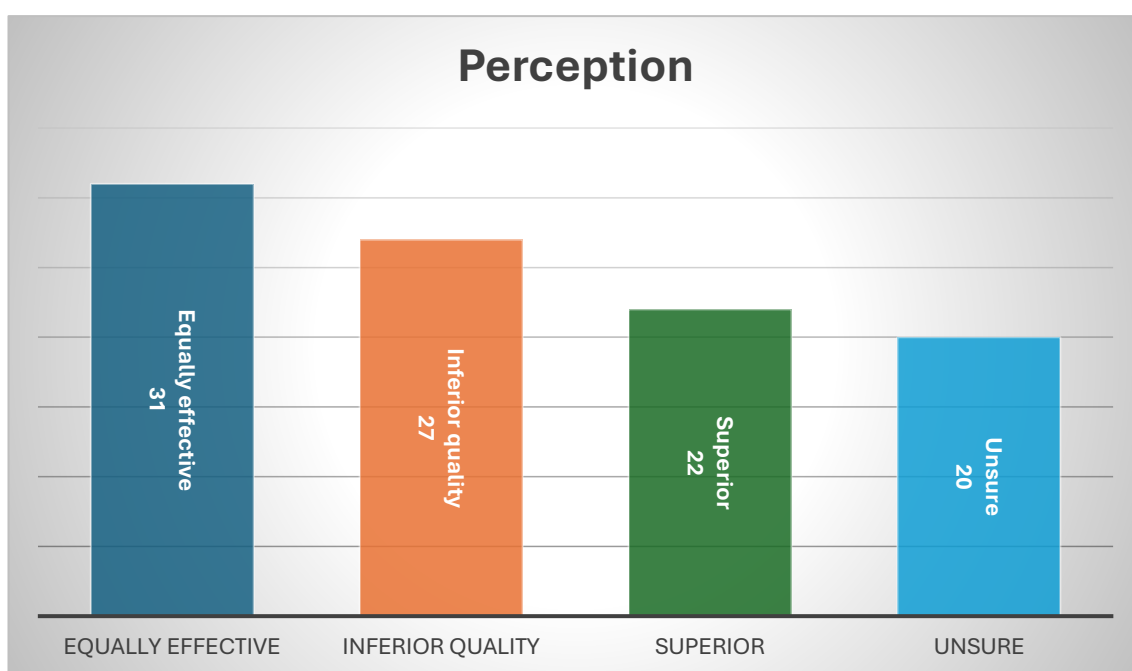


Figure 4-3 Perceptions Compared to Patented Drugs

These findings confirm that perceptions of branded generics are shaped by ambiguity and partial knowledge, underscoring the need for transparent education campaigns.

4.3 Trust and Influencing Factors

Trust is a key variable in the adoption of branded generics:

- 35% of respondents expressed trust in branded generics
- 34% distrusted them
- 31% were undecided

Table 4-4 Trust in Branded Generics

Trust Level	Percentage
Trust	35
Distrusted	34
Undecided	31

Key factors influencing trust and usage include:

- Price and affordability (55%): The most commonly cited advantage, highlighting the economic incentive.
- Doctor’s recommendation (50%): Endorsement by trusted HCPs emerged as a powerful influencer.
- Previous personal experience (40%): Users who had positive prior exposure were significantly more confident in repurchasing and recommending.
- Pharmacist’s advice (30%) and availability in stores (25%) also impacted perceptions.

Importantly, patients who had previously used branded generics were found to be 42% more likely to recommend them to others, reinforcing the significance of trust built through experience.

4.4 Impact of Marketing Strategies

A major focus of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of patient-centred marketing tactics:

- Digital Campaign Reach: 60% of respondents had seen some form of digital content promoting branded generics. However, awareness did not always translate into action.
- Perceived Effectiveness:
 - 10% rated campaigns as “very effective”
 - 18% found them “moderately effective”
 - 21% considered them “slightly effective”
 - 17% saw them as “not effective”

This response highlights a gap between digital outreach and conversion, suggesting that content may lack emotional resonance or educational clarity.

- HCP Influence:
 - 45% felt strongly influenced by doctor or pharmacist recommendations
 - 30% reported moderate influence
 - 25% said they experienced minimal or no influence
- Digital Presence and Brand Decision:
 - 38% acknowledged a strong digital brand presence positively influenced their purchase behaviour
 - 35% were indifferent or negatively influenced
 - 27% remained unsure

These numbers show digital branding has potential, but only if strategically aligned with user values and healthcare realities.

4.5 Statistical Associations and Predictive Insights

Chi-square tests revealed a strong and statistically significant relationship ($p < 0.01$) between physician endorsements and higher trust in branded generics.

Logistic regression further showed:

- Exposure to digital marketing was a significant predictor of purchase intent (OR = 1.8, $p < 0.05$)
- Discounts or affordability schemes influenced decisions positively (OR = 1.5, $p < 0.05$)
- Among patients aged 25 – 30, these effects were especially pronounced, suggesting this age group is more receptive to marketing interventions.

4.6 Summary of Key Findings

- Branded generics have moderate visibility and familiarity, but many consumers still lack trust or sufficient understanding.
- Cost and HCP endorsement are the top factors driving acceptance.

- Personal experience plays a major role in consumer advocacy.
- Digital marketing holds promise, though current implementations are not fully persuasive.
- There is a statistically validated impact of HCPs and digital tools on brand trust and purchase likelihood.

These findings will be critically analysed in the next chapter to understand their implications for patient-centred marketing strategies.

5. Discussion

This chapter interprets the results presented in the previous section through the lens of the study's objectives, existing literature, and strategic implications. It explores the significance of the key findings and their relevance for patient-centered marketing of branded generics in India. The discussion also addresses how these insights can be translated into practical strategies for pharmaceutical companies and healthcare stakeholders.

5.1 Interpretation of Key Findings

The findings underscore the centrality of trust in the adoption of branded generics. Despite branded generics forming the backbone of India's pharmaceutical supply, nearly one in five patients remains unfamiliar with them, and only about a third fully trust them. This trust gap is not merely a function of product quality, but also of inadequate communication and a lack of patient-facing branding strategies.

The statistically significant influence of healthcare professional (HCP) endorsements confirms their indispensable role as trust brokers. Patients still place immense confidence in doctors and pharmacists, making them effective ambassadors for branding initiatives. Aligning HCPs with marketing communication is therefore critical for any campaign seeking to elevate branded generics from low-engagement commodities to trusted therapeutic options.

Digital marketing, while showing moderate reach, has not yet achieved optimal effectiveness. The disconnect between campaign reach and its emotional or educational impact suggests that generic messaging and lack of personalization are barriers to deeper engagement. However, among the 25 – 30 age cohort, digital tools have a measurable effect, indicating a promising opportunity to scale impact with more refined targeting and tailored content.

5.2 The Role of Personal Experience

Perhaps the most compelling insight is that patients who had used branded generics in the past year were 42% more likely to recommend them. This highlights the importance of experience-driven trust, which is a key component of consumer advocacy. Real-world exposure, coupled with positive therapeutic outcomes, forms a self-reinforcing trust

cycle. Pharmaceutical companies could leverage this by promoting patient stories and testimonial-driven campaigns.

5.3 Patient-Centred Marketing in Practice

The findings affirm the hypothesis that patient-centred marketing strategies significantly influence trust and adoption of branded generics. These strategies include not only digital outreach but also educational initiatives at the pharmacy level, patient helplines, branded content explaining drug efficacy, and multilingual information kits.

The study proposes a marketing ecosystem built on four pillars:

- Education: Using multimedia and local language materials to demystify branded generics.
- Trust Building: Equipping HCPs with co-branded educational content and starter kits.
- Digital Engagement: Harnessing WhatsApp, YouTube, and healthcare apps for patient onboarding and ongoing communication.
- Omnichannel Integration: Linking offline experiences (e.g., in-store displays, community camps) with QR-coded content that drives patients online.

5.4 Alignment with Existing Literature

The results are consistent with global and regional literature. Studies such as Reddy & Chaturvedi (2021) and Kumar et al. (2022) emphasize the value of physician advocacy and transparent branding, both of which were confirmed by this study. Similarly, Rao & Singh (2020) advocate for digital tools as effective engagement channels findings reinforced here by the positive impact among younger users.

5.5 Challenges and Limitations

Despite promising insights, several challenges remain. The use of convenience sampling may have introduced selection bias, particularly toward urban respondents. Limited rural outreach might have underrepresented important behavioural differences in less digitally connected populations. Further, the subjective nature of qualitative responses introduces potential bias despite careful thematic coding.

5.6 Strategic Implications

For pharmaceutical companies:

- A shift toward value-based, patient-informed branding is necessary.
- Investment in physician training and digital literacy is vital.
- Patient experience should be central to campaign narratives.

For policy makers:

- Encourage standardization of patient information materials.
- Promote public-private collaborations for generic awareness.
- Incentivize digital adoption across primary healthcare networks.

6. Conclusion

This final chapter consolidates the key insights derived from the research and translates them into actionable recommendations for pharmaceutical marketers, healthcare professionals, and policymakers. The chapter also reflects on the broader implications of patient-centred marketing in the Indian healthcare context and outlines directions for future research.

6.1 Summary of the Study

This study aimed to evaluate how patient-centred marketing strategies can transform the perception of branded generics from commoditized alternatives to trusted therapeutic solutions. Through a mixed-methods approach involving 370 respondents including patients, HCPs, and pharmaceutical marketers the research identified key trends, behavioural patterns, and influential drivers of trust and adoption.

Findings revealed that while awareness of branded generics is moderate, trust remains fragmented. Price sensitivity, HCP endorsements, and prior experience were the most significant factors influencing patient decisions. Digital marketing showed potential, especially among younger patients, but lacked emotional and informational depth in its current execution.

6.2 Key Conclusions

- Trust in branded generics is deeply influenced by the communication channel, source credibility (e.g., HCPs), and previous usage.
- Patient-centred strategies particularly those involving digital engagement, education, and personal stories can effectively shift consumer perceptions.
- HCPs continue to play a pivotal role as influencers and brand advocates.
- Digital tools must evolve from passive awareness to interactive, personalized engagement platforms.
- Experience-driven trust based on satisfactory therapeutic outcomes is the strongest promoter of brand loyalty.

6.3 Recommendations for Pharmaceutical Marketers

1. **Redesign Marketing Content:** Move from technical branding to value-based messaging that highlights patient benefits, safety, and quality.
2. **Leverage HCPs as Educators:** Equip doctors and pharmacists with co-branded educational materials to distribute during consultations.
3. **Invest in Digital Transformation:** Expand marketing into digital ecosystems, including health apps, WhatsApp automation, YouTube explainers, and AI-based chatbots.
4. **Promote Testimonials:** Use patient voices and experiences to humanize brand messaging.
5. **Ensure Multilingual Accessibility:** Develop content in regional languages to maximize rural and semi-urban reach.

6.4 Recommendations for Policy Makers

1. **Develop Public Awareness Campaigns:** Use state and national media to promote understanding of branded generics.
2. **Standardize Patient Communication:** All branded generics must have easily comprehensible product information and patient leaflets.
3. **Encourage Digital Literacy Initiatives:** Educate community health workers and health care professionals on digital health communication techniques.
4. **Promote Cooperation:** To expand education initiatives throughout states, promote public-private partnerships.

6.5 Future Research Directions

- Explore rural perceptions and behaviour related to branded generics.
- Evaluate long-term impact of digital patient engagement on medication adherence.
- Examine how gamification and mobile health tools can improve loyalty and trust.

6.6 Final Reflection

In conclusion, if rethought from a patient-centered perspective, branded generics have the potential to meet both commercial and public health goals. According to the research, trust is developed via engagement, education, and empathy rather than being solely determined by cost or prescription. The foundation of long-term brand success in pharmaceutical marketing will be the transition from a transactional model to a relational one where patients feel informed and appreciated.

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